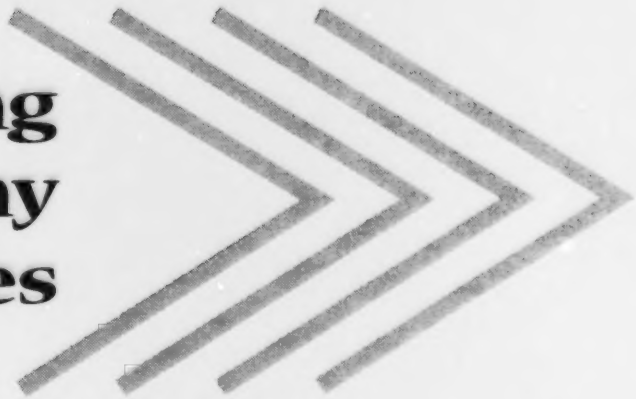
ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

August 1998

Fostering Healthy Communities



Yukon
Health and Social Services

Introduction

The Government of Yukon's anti-poverty strategy is a framework designed to ensure that territorial resources are focused, coordinated and effective in addressing poverty. It is built upon the action commitments contained in the Action Agenda 1997-2000, primarily fostering healthy communities and creating employment and economic opportunities.

This strategy provides an opportunity to identify what is in place and what is planned to close gaps, decrease duplication and overlap, and enhance efforts and partnerships with others to help achieve the government's vision and strategy objectives.

The Yukon Government cannot act alone and acknowledges the shared responsibility of the individual, the community and all governments in addressing poverty. In 1989, a unanimous all-party House of Commons resolution was passed to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. At the First Ministers' meeting in June 1996, the Prime Minister and premiers made tackling child poverty a collective priority.

In spite of these commitments, anti-poverty groups report that child poverty has been increasing and the need for a coordinated response is more urgent than ever. At the same time that the federal government has announced new money for a national child benefit, federal transfer payments to the provinces and territories have been significantly reduced. Unilateral federal decision-making continues, offloading program costs onto provincial and territorial governments. The fiscal framework that provincial and territorial governments are now forced to live within constrain their ability to take anti-poverty measures.

Limited fiscal resources, issues of jurisdiction and questions of priorities underline the need for all governments to work together to help solve the complex issues of poverty. Efforts have begun at the national level with federal and provincial/ territorial governments currently negotiating a new framework agreement on the social union that will redefine the fundamental relationships between these governments on social policy issues.

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This strategy provides a framework upon which this government can refine its efforts to ensure that linkages between various initiatives are made and coordinated, and improvements can be realized. It is an on-going process that will aid this government in planning, decision-making and focusing on priorities to help alleviate poverty and its effects in the Yukon.

The Yukon Government recognizes that First Nations have jurisdiction with respect to matters effecting their citizens through Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements and that they wish to protect the cultural, political and economic distinctiveness and social well-being of their people. The Yukon Government will continue to work cooperatively with Yukon First Nation governments to address complex social issues such as poverty, while respecting their right to self-determination.

Government vision

This government believes that everyone has a right to have a minimum standard of living that ensures adequate food, shelter, clothing, safety and the ability to fully participate in society. Some people struggle daily to make ends meet and government must assist those in need.

The Yukon government recognizes its role in providing leadership to address complex social issues such as poverty. In order to provide this leadership it must have a vision of where it is going. The vision for the future was recently articulated in the 1998/99 budget address where it stated:

> *"The Yukon Government is committed to promoting a society where barriers to full social and economic participation of all Yukon people are lowered."*

Principles

Poverty and homelessness are realities that society must address. The Yukon Government has a duty to those who are vulnerable due to physical or mental challenges or who are economically disadvantaged. This government must ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable members of society are being addressed. The anti-poverty strategy is built on six key principles

1. Accessibility

The Yukon Government has an obligation to ensure that Yukon people have universal access to the highest possible standard of health, education and social services.

2. Financial stewardship

The Yukon Government must manage public finances wisely and where necessary and appropriate, direct government resources to those most at risk and in need.

3. Accountability

The Yukon Government must be accountable to the people it serves and the effectiveness of its policies, programs and services must be monitored/assessed regularly.

4. Economic opportunity

The Yukon Government recognizes the importance of the development and diversification of the Yukon economy in order to create an economic climate which provides jobs and opportunities for Yukon people.

5. Public participation

Planning for the future must emphasize teamwork, partnership and public participation. Yukon people deserve the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

6. Partnerships

The Yukon Government will work cooperatively with other governments and non-government organizations and agencies to ensure that programs and services and other anti-poverty efforts are well coordinated and effective.

Current status

As our standard of living has increased over the past century, so has our level of expectation as to what is an acceptable standard of living in the Yukon.

Our capacity to access the basics has improved over time. An average Whitehorse household now spends 1/3 of its money on food, clothing and shelter as compared to nearly 1/2 in 1972. This means that incomes have generally increased in the Yukon and that an average family in Whitehorse spends proportionally less now on the basics than it did 25 years ago. While this suggests some improvement over time, other indicators remind us that the problem of poverty is still very much with us.

It has long been recognized that problems with access to the basics often co-exist with other problems such as substance abuse, addiction, family breakdown, neglect, violence, disability and ill health. Women and children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly are especially vulnerable to the negative impacts of poverty.

A recent report of the National Anti-Poverty Organization points out that the richest 20 percent of Canadians saw their average incomes increase by $2,000 between 1995 and 1996, while the poorest 20 percent saw their incomes fall by $500. Federal cash transfers for social programs fell by more than 40 percent in real per capita terms between 1993 and 1997. Recent changes to Employment Insurance have also reduced incomes and have resulted in a greater burden on the social assistance program.

Problems also arise from fluctuations in the availability of year-round employment resulting from the Yukon's resource and tourism-based economy which is characterized by a prevalence of seasonal employment. The seasonal nature of the Yukon labour market prevents some Yukon people from maintaining long-term employment. As a result, seasonal workers may be faced with a smaller set of lifestyle options than year-round workers.

The nature of the problem suggests a two-fold approach. First, we must be able to respond effectively when basic needs cannot be met, for whatever reason. This points to maintaining the existing social safety net and, where gaps are evident, the net must be expanded and improved.

But achieving the basics is not enough. We must strive to give those living in poverty the tools to take control of their lives and the ability to break out of poverty.

Strategy objectives

In order to realize this government's overall vision, policies will be developed and refined and a coordinated range of accessible and effective programs and services will be provided aimed at:

- maintaining and improving the "social safety net," and
- breaking the cycle of poverty.

Core strategies

The government has identified six core strategies aimed at realizing its primary objectives.

1. Ensuring that the basic needs of all people are met.
2. Ensuring universal access to comprehensive health, education and social services.
3. Decreasing barriers to full social and economic participation in Yukon society due to discrimination based on gender, race, age, source of income, religion or disability.
4. Supporting the creation of jobs and economic opportunities.
5. Providing education and training, and promoting attachment to the work force.
6. Improving the health status of low income families.

Action plan for implementing core strategies

The Yukon Government has a clear obligation to those who are vulnerable due to economic disadvantage. As such, the government is committed to attacking the issue of poverty in the Yukon through the continual improvement of existing policies, programs and services and the introduction of progressive new initiatives. These new initiatives comprise the Action Plan for achieving the government's anti-poverty objectives.

Following are listed the six core strategies and their action items with the lead government departments.

1. Ensuring that the basic needs of all people are met

Minimum wage increase	Justice
National Child Benefit and future reinvestments	Health and Social Services
Children's Drug and Optical Program	Health and Social Services
Funding for Food for Learning Program	Health and Social Services
Family Property and Support Act review	Justice
Maintenance and Custody Orders Act review and revision	Justice
Minimum Basket of Goods and Services research	Bureau of Statistics
Mobile Home Strategy, comprised of a Relocation Assistance Program, an Upgrade Program, an Emergency Repair Program, an Equity Exchange Program, and a Purchase Assistance Program (Shared Equity)	Yukon Housing Corporation
Transient shelter	Health and Social Services
Assisted Home Ownership Program	Yukon Housing Corporation
Seniors housing needs	Yukon Housing Corporation
Landlord and Tenant Act review re: mobile home parks	Justice
Family Violence Prevention Act implementation	Justice

2. Ensuring universal access to comprehensive health, education and social services

Children's Drug and Optical Program	Health and Social Services
Yukon Children's Dental Program review	Health and Social Services
Non-government organizations funding policy	all departments
Continuing care (facility-based and community-based) needs review	Health and Social Services
Mental Health program enhancements	Health and Social Services
Yukon Government Youth Strategy	Education
Alcohol and Drug Services program changes	Health and Social Services
Homecare program enhancements and IV drug program	Health and Social Services
National Children's Agenda	Health and Social Services

3. Decreasing barriers to full social and economic participation in Yukon society due to discrimination based on gender, race, age, source of income, religion or disability

Economic gender equality indicators development	Women's Directorate
Programs and Services for Persons with Disabilities initiative	Health and Social Services
Promotion of women's economic security issues	Women's Directorate
Research to develop profile on Yukon women	Women's Directorate
Money Smarts for young Yukon women project	Women's Directorate

4. Supporting the creation of jobs and economic opportunities

Community Development Fund (CDF)	Economic Development
Trade and Investment Diversification Strategy	Economic Development
Promotion of the new Yukon Oil and Gas Act	Economic Development
Consultations on development of a Yukon forest policy	Forestry Commission
Development plans for emerging industries such as forestry, cultural industries and sports and recreation	Economic Development
Budget increase for tourism and other marketing initiatives	Tourism
Promote export opportunities for Yukon housing industry	Yukon Housing Corporation
Yukon Hire Commission recommendations	all departments

5. Providing education and training, and promoting attachment to the work force

Implementation of a Yukon Training Strategy	Education
Labour Market Development Agreement	Education
Training Trust Funds	Education
Survival Skills for Women Program	Health and Social Services
Youth Works Program	Education
Introduction of a Reading Recovery/Early Intervention Program	Education

6. Improving the health status of low income families

Healthy Child Initiatives: early intervention/teen pregnancy prevention	Health and Social Services
Yukon Children's Dental Program review	Health and Social Services
Expansion of Whitehorse Health Centre prenatal and newborn programs	Health and Social Services
Outreach Health Clinics	Health and Social Services
Outreach Seniors' Social Worker	Health and Social Services
Seniors' Fitness Program	Health and Social Services
Diabetes Education program	Health and Social Services
Chronic Disease Self Management program	Health and Social Services

Evaluation

Poverty is difficult to define and Canada has no official poverty line. In the past year, there has been a considerable amount of attention at the federal/provincial/territorial level devoted to reaching a consensus on the way in which to define and measure poverty. The considerable interest in developing an appropriate poverty measure (to replace Statistics Canada's misused Low Income Cut-Off or LICO measure) has stemmed from the desire to monitor the progress of various programs and policies designed to combat poverty. Current programs and services have built-in tools to monitor, evaluate and assess the effectiveness of programs, so at this level, internal evaluation is ongoing.

A new poverty measure being considered involves the costing of a "basket" of necessities (food, shelter, clothing and other items). Any individual or household with a disposable (after taxes) income less than the total cost of the basket would be defined as living in poverty. A similar methodology will be used by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics in its up-coming research.

One of the tasks of the anti-poverty strategy will be the development of a set of indicators that will help the Yukon Government understand the nature of poverty in the Yukon and monitor and assess progress in meeting the strategy objectives.

Next steps

The government's anti-poverty strategy will be an evolving document and not an end product on its own. It is a tool to promote discussion and decision-making and will undergo continuous development and change. A two-phase approach will be taken to refine and continually update the strategy and aid decision-makers. A Yukon Government interdepartmental working group has been formed to coordinate and manage the strategy from the government perspective.

Phase 1: Strategy refinement

The government requires feedback on key elements within the strategy in order to improve and refine the initial draft of the document. This first phase will focus on workshops with an anti-poverty reference group comprised of representative non-government organizations and constituent groups to receive feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Phase 2: On-going changes

Once the initial strategy is refined based on feedback, an on-going process will be developed to address specific priority issues and to provide suggestions and recommendations to government. The process for on-going non-government input will be one of the subjects of discussion in Phase l. Based on the agreed to on-going process, the strategy will be adjusted, updated and reported on.

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